



Reflections

Tell the Story

Raising Our Transatlantic Voices

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In her TEDtalk on “The Danger of a Single Story,” Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns us that the way stories are told, the identity of the storyteller, and the diversity of stories told are all influenced by power, highlighting the potential of storytelling to challenge and reshape dominant narratives.² As she reminds us, power is not just the ability to narrate another person's story but to make it the definitive account of that person.

The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti makes a similar point when he says that “it is easy to blur the truth with a simple linguistic trick: start your story from ‘Secondly.’ . . . [Simply neglect] to speak of what happened first. Start your story with ‘Secondly,’ and the world will be turned upside-down.”³ Barghouti gives several examples of starting a story with ‘secondly,’ to which I would add, begin the story of colonialism with Columbus, the “discoverer,” and not with those he claimed to have discovered, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the European marauders on the search for gold and not with the souls they dehumanized and oppressed in the process, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the West and not the Rest, and you have an altogether different story of the exploitation of the Rest by the West,

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² Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story,” TEDGlobal, July 2009, 18:39, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

³ Mourid Barghouti, “Reunion,” chapter 8 in Barghouti’s *I Saw Ramallah*, trans. by Ahdaf Soueif, Foreword by Edward W. Said (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), n.p., https://istandwithpalestine.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/OceanofPDF.com_I_Saw_Ramallah_-_Mourid_Barghouti.pdf

Tell the Story: Raising Our Transatlantic Voices

corrected by Walter Rodney in his work *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972, 1974; rev. 1981), which highlights the inequity of global inequality.

It is crucial to start the story from the beginning. This will reveal the true culprits behind the narrative. It's not just about what comes 'secondly' that requires our attention, but full consideration of other, earlier factors that tell a different story. Starting the story from a different perspective can be transformative. The Transatlantic Writing workshop allowed formerly colonized voices to speak of what happened first, not second. Who we are (*identity*), where we live (*social space*), how we survive from day to day (*experiences*), our interests — these must influence the story we tell.

In Ghana, one of the more sobering and dehumanizing experiences was to stand at a door labelled the ***Door of No Return*** at Cape Coast Castle, through which trafficked Africans passed as they were taken to the canoes to be rowed out to the waiting ships. On our visit there, our guide said, “*You see how this door was labelled. The idea was: ‘Go through this door, and you are no longer human. Everything about your former life, including being human, is now over, gone.’*” The purpose of our gathering, and this wider project, is to produce more written materials. To consider the value and impact of our words. To encourage one another that our voices matter, and that words are powerful, as tools for both good and evil. In this visit to Cape Coast Castle, we were reminded that just by someone's words — the words of a human being — another human being, whom God equally created in God's image and likeness, in whom God equally breathed the breath of life, is suddenly no longer considered a human being.

The movement from the sea, from Cape Coast (Ghana) via the Atlantic Ocean to the Caribbean, recalled at the Cape Coast Castle, was no liberation. We were told that having gone through the voyage, should they survive, the indignity and horror as they went through the *Door of No Return*, being no longer regarded as human beings, was of lasting traumatic impact. They lost not only their homes, families, language, communities, but their very right to be considered human. But on what basis? Based on what philosophy? Grounded in what belief? Who can render asunder those of whom God is mindful and whom He has put together? Who God visited and made a little lower than the angels and crowned with glory and honor? To whom God gave dominion and put all earthly creatures under their feet? But, as we saw from the example at Cape Coast Castle, and as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie reminds us, this dehumanization starts with a word or a single story. Words are powerful.

Here is our opportunity to raise our voices against that state of nobodiness. May the purposes for which we have gathered — to raise our transatlantic voices — be realized to the fullest measure.